

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



995

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Temple B'Nai Israel

other name/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 127 South Barry St. _____ not for publication

city or town Olean _____ N/A vicinity

state New York code NY county Cattaraugus code 009 zip code 14760

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Robert A. Rupert DSHPO 11/14/11
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other, (explain:) _____

Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

1.4.12
Date of Action

Temple B'Nai Israel
Name of Property

Cattaraugus County, New York
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ public-local
☒ private
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(check only one box)

- ☐ district
☒ building(s)
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/synagogue

Current Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/synagogue

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

mixed

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete
walls brick
terra cotta
roof asphalt
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Temple B'Nai Israel
Cattaraugus County, New York

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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DESCRIPTION

Temple B'Nai Israel is located at 127 South Barry Street in Olean, a city in Cattaraugus County in southwestern New York State. The synagogue is one block south and east of the intersection of the city's two main commercial streets, Union and State streets, in a primarily residential neighborhood. On either side of the temple and on the opposite side of the street are vernacular two-story, wood-frame houses from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The temple is on the east side of the street, with a shallow setback from the sidewalk, matching the setbacks of neighboring houses. It nearly fills its lot, with only a narrow strip of grass between the building and the driveways of adjacent houses.

Exterior

The temple is light brown brick building that follows a simple, rectangular footprint. Its height is comparable to a three-to-four-story building with the apparent height augmented by the building's curved false front. Behind the false front, the roof gable runs east and west. Decorative details are executed in buff-colored terracotta. The west façade contains the curved false front and is dominated by a colossal terra cotta arched portal nearly the height of the building. Enframed within the arch are a large leaded-glass round window and three large wood doors. On either side of the portal is a three-quarter height brick buttress topped with an acanthus and scroll cap. The roofline has terracotta coping. The portal is set at the top of a flight of steps furnished with two original brass handrails. Brick knee walls flank the steps, each with an original post light.

The portal surround is a stilted arch with a two-order archivolt, resting on unembellished rectangular plinths. The voussoirs are toothed into the brick field giving a quoined appearance. Voussoirs are splayed to the interior. The splayed face is decorated with an arabesque terminating at each plinth with a short acanthus leaf. The outer colonette is embellished with a raised repeating palm-like motif and separated from the inner colonette with an egg-and-blossom mold. The inner colonette is incised with a twisted groove, giving the appearance of a stylized flat rope mold. The colonettes are continuous from plinth to plinth, with no capitals or other interruption.

At the base of the portal are three large, fifteen-paneled wood doors. The doors are flanked by engaged columns set on bases with composite capitals. The two outer columns are semi-octagonal; the inner columns have plain rounded shafts. These columns support a three-panel entablature defined by bands of decorative molding at the top and bottom. The center panel bears the incised words "B'NAI ISRAEL."

At the top of the portal, just above the three-paneled entablature is the round window shielded with an elaborate carved wood grille, painted to match the surrounding stone. At the center of the grille is a Star of David encircled by a band with an X-shaped pattern. Twenty-two columns radiate out from the star. They alternate between plain and twisted shafts, all with composite capitals. Overlapping arches connect the capitals of alternating columns. A simple trefoil is set into each of the spandrels formed by the overlapping arches. The entire composition is encircled by a narrowly incised, plain band.

The building's north and south elevations are nearly identical. The western-most bay of each side wall projects slightly out from the rest of the wall and is raised in height to match the false front of the façade, terminating in a red tile roof. Subtle vertical corbelling reinforces the resemblance of this projecting bay to a medieval tower.

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This bay corresponds to the interior vestibule, stair, and restroom area. Windows in this section consist of two basement windows. Above the water table is a pair of arched windows separated by a twisted column with an incised arch encircling both.

East of the tower-like bay, the wall terminates at the eaves. This part of the building has a slightly projecting brick water table consisting of a row of soldier bricks with bands of header bricks above and below. On each side are four tall, round-arched stained-glass windows with keystones. The only difference between the north and south sides occurs in the easternmost bay. The north side consists of a door leading to a short flight of metal steps and, on the south side, consists of a single double-hung window with a shallow-arched top. The rear (east) elevation is simple and utilitarian. A small shed roof shelters a basement entrance. Above this are two double-hung windows with translucent glass and a very small double window vent near the gable. A brick chimney is flush with the wall and projects just south of the peak of the gable.

Interior

The interior consists of the first floor, divided into the vestibule, worship space, and offices; and the basement, containing a social hall and kitchen. The vestibule features an original tile floor, ceiling light fixture and doors leading to adjoining spaces. All doors are wood, stained dark brown, with large decorative stained-glass lights. North of the vestibule is a small ladies' lounge and restroom with a tile floor and double-arched window. The wall dividing the lounge and restroom terminates at the division between the double windows. Stairs leading to the balcony and basement are south of the vestibule. The arched, stained-glass windows in the stair hall are partially obscured by the stair. All woodwork throughout the vestibule, lounge/restroom, and stair hall appears to be original, and is stained in the stair hall and painted in the other spaces.

A pair of doors leads from the vestibule into the worship space. Each door features a large central panel of colored, irregularly textured, leaded glass, with a fleur-de-lis set in a circle atop a grid of rectangles and squares. Surrounding the glass is wood carved to form a low-relief scroll at the top and fluted pilasters at the sides. The worship space is a single open space with a balcony in the rear (west), recessed over the vestibule, and platform, bimah and ark along the east wall. Seating consists of the original plywood theater-style seats in straight rows flanking a wide center aisle. The focal point of the space is the east wall, where the ark, the ritual resting place for the Torah scrolls, is set within a decorative carved wooden housing at the back of an elevated platform or bimah. The composition combines classical elements, including composite columns and egg-and-dart molding, with Judaic motifs such as a large Star of David and a cartouche in the shape of a pair of tablets representing the Ten Commandments.

In the rear of the worship space is a balcony, set within the space between the stair on the south and a closet on the north. There are no fixed seats in the balcony. The round window overlooks the balcony and has a menorah at its center, surrounded by a radial pattern of acanthus and other foliate designs. The arched stained-glass windows, four on each side of the worship space, also contain geometric and foliate motifs, including a repeated fleur-de-lis motif in the field and a frame of paired foliate scrolls.¹ The bottom central pane of each window

¹ According to Marcia Storch, congregation president, the windows were produced in Philadelphia.

Temple B'Nai Israel
Cattaraugus County, New York

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contains the name of the window's donor or honoree. The coffered ceiling has exposed plaster beams supported by brackets, running north to south. Pendant light fixtures, which appear to be original, hang from these beams. The entire ceiling is painted white.²

The final spaces on the first floor are a pair of small offices, reached from doors on the east wall of the worship space, flanking the central platform. These two spaces are mirror images of each other in plan. The north office has an exit door on its north wall, while the south office has a window on its south wall. Both are utilitarian spaces without notable original features and are used as study and storage spaces. The offices are connected by a narrow passageway, behind the bimah, lit by two translucent windows on the building's east wall.

The building has a basement that consists of a large social hall with tile flooring, wood paneling, and a dropped lay-in acoustical-tile ceiling. At the west end of the room is a platform separated from the hall by an accordion-fold screen. A kitchen is located at the east end of the basement. The basement was remodeled in the mid-twentieth century. Its overall configuration is largely original, but all current finishes are related to the remodeling.

² A newspaper article about construction of the synagogue noted the ceiling was to have ornamental painting, but it is unknown whether this was executed. Marcia Storch, president of the congregation, recalls the ceiling always having been white in her 27-year membership.

Temple B'Nai Israel
Name of Property

Cattaraugus County, New York
County and State

8. Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☒ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1929

Significant Dates

1929

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

J. Milton Hurd

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other Name of repository:

Bero Architecture PLLC, Rochester NY

Temple B'Nai Israel
Cattaraugus County, New York

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Temple B'Nai Israel is significant under Criterion C and Criterion Consideration A as a highly intact example of an early twentieth-century synagogue in a small city in Western New York. Demonstrating its architect's knowledge of national trends in synagogue architecture, its design combines a variety of motifs derived from historic Southern and Eastern European styles, as well as Middle Eastern architecture with an eclectic blend considered culturally appropriate for synagogues. The façade, dominated by a single, massive arch, is similar to other notable American synagogues of the period that employed comparable motifs, specifically B'nai Jeshurun in Manhattan and Temple Beth-El (Young Israel Beth El of Borough Park) in Brooklyn. The building played an important role locally as the spiritual, cultural, and social center for the small, but active Jewish community of Olean. This community was initially organized and spearheaded for over sixty years by H.W. Marcus, who immigrated to the United States from the Russian empire as a child and settled in Olean in 1881. In many ways, the Olean community's growth and evolution exemplified the development of Jewish communities in small American towns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Temple B'Nai Israel retains an exceptionally high degree of integrity to its 1929 construction.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Olean's Jewish community was organized as a congregation in the 1880s. At that time, the City of Olean was booming, primarily due to the rich oil fields that made the southwest area of New York State a top oil-producing region. This resource was primarily used as lubricants and heating fuel. Later, the advent of the internal combustion engine created a demand for oil refined into gasoline. The name "Olean" was purportedly derived from the Latin word for "oil." In addition to oil, Olean was also a transportation hub as the city was at the conjunction of the Allegheny River and Genesee Valley Canal. Extensive railroad lines also connected the city to the rest of the region, the state and the nation.¹

In 1881, H.W. Marcus passed through Olean while visiting relatives on his honeymoon. Marcus was born in 1857 in Riga (then in the Russian Empire) and was raised in Mobile, Alabama, and Brooklyn, New York. He decided to stay in Olean, having determined it to be a prosperous place in which to set up a business. He bought a grocery store with his wife's brother, who lived in nearby Eldred, Pennsylvania, and converted it into a dry-goods store called Shear and Marcus, Inc. With his arrival in Olean, he immediately sought to establish a Jewish congregation, even though, according to various sources, there may have been only one other Jewish family in Olean when he arrived.² Within his first year in Olean, he had organized the "Olean Social Club," a group of sixteen Jewish men gathered from the surrounding area. The Olean Social Club gradually grew as

¹ Interview with David Deckman, City Historian, 13 April 2011; and Maggie Fredrickson, ed., *Cattaraugus County Bicentennial History, 1808-2008: 200 Years of Adventure – Past, Present and Future* (n.p., n.d. [2008]), 119-121. For another overview of Olean history, see William Adams, ed., *Historical Gazetteer and Biographical Memorial of Cattaraugus County, NY* (Syracuse, NY: Lyman, Horton & Co., 1893).

² Information about H.W. Marcus and the early Jewish community is from Trudy G. Forrest, "The History of the Olean Jewish Community with Some Reference to European Jewish Antecedents" (M.A. Thesis, St. Bonaventure University, 1968); Eileen McCartan Smith, "B'Nai Israel Temple," *Olean Times Herald Sesquicentennial*, 1954; Joseph M. Bear, "So Long Ago But Only Yesterday – Memoirs of the Jewish Community of Olean," 1970; *B'Nai Israel Annual Year Book*, 1941; Robin Conwit, "The Marcus Story," and Jeff Segall, "The Jewish Community," both from *Sandpumpings* Vol. 2, No. 1, October-November 1976.

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Marcus and other early Jewish residents persuaded friends and family members to come to thriving Olean. Some of the newcomers established retail businesses, as Marcus had done. Others found work in the oil business or began as peddlers or junk dealers. Many were born in Eastern Europe and had lived in other parts of the United States before coming to Olean. These settlement patterns and choices of occupations were very common in small-town Jewish populations.³

Marcus's arrival in Olean coincided with the onset of a large wave of migration of Eastern European Jews to the United States, prompted to leave Europe by economic conditions and persecution. Some two million Eastern European Jews immigrated between 1881 and 1924, being the majority of the 4.25 million Jewish residents of the United States at the end of the 1920s.⁴ Most Eastern European Jewish immigrants settled in large cities with long-established Jewish populations. Like Marcus, those who eventually ended up in smaller communities like Olean had typically lived in a larger city first and moved to a smaller community where they recognized economic opportunities and/or had family connections.⁵

The Jewish community of Olean functioned as the Olean Social Club until 1887, when it was renamed the Young Men's Hebrew Association. The name changed again in 1894 to the Olean Hebrew Organization, followed by the Olean Hebrew Congregation in 1896. During this period, spiritual leadership of the congregation was provided primarily by learned laymen, with an ordained rabbi coming from out of town to conduct High Holy Day services. The congregation's first ordained rabbi, Rabbi Elias Winer, came to them around 1895 or 1896. Throughout the history of the congregation, it was difficult to keep ordained rabbis for any length of time. As with many small Jewish congregations, this resulted in frequent turnover as rabbis moved on to greater opportunities. Lay leaders always played important roles in both spiritual and temporal affairs of the congregation, providing continuity despite the short tenure of most rabbis.

From 1881 to 1929, the congregation met in various rented spaces in downtown Olean, including the Merritt Building at North Union and State, local fraternal lodge halls, the Wagner Opera House Block, City Council chambers, and, for fifteen years, the third floor of the former Brendell Building. Additional spaces were rented for social activities and Sunday School programs. The congregation was typical of fledgling Jewish congregations in small communities, which often met in private homes or upper floors of downtown buildings until a permanent synagogue could be built. This less than ideal arrangement led to problems with other users of a space, particularly when holidays conflicted with the regular meetings and events of other organizations. Between 1918 and 1940, Olean's Jewish population doubled, with families moving to the area from elsewhere in the United States. The Jewish families living in and around Olean had a very high rate of participation in the congregation, which now offered a variety of social and educational opportunities including the active Daughters of Israel organization for Jewish women.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 96-124.

⁴ In 1924, the U.S. Congress passed the Johnson-Reed Act, which severely restricted immigration. Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 2.

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 44-45.

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Construction of Temple B'Nai Israel

The growth of the Olean Hebrew Congregation reflected the prosperity of the city of Olean. Its location at the junction of the Pennsylvania and Erie Railroads and at the terminus of the Pittsburgh, Shawmut & Northern Railroad system was very beneficial to local industries. While the storage of petroleum and manufacture of petroleum products was a primary industry, machinery manufacturing was also very important, with the Pennsylvania Railroad's shops as a major employer. Other items manufactured in Olean included leather, glass, paving block, floor tile, and silk. The 1927 city directory reported new park improvement projects and upscale subdivisions as evidence of the community's prosperity.⁶

After putting its building plans on hold during World War I, the Olean Hebrew Congregation hired architect J. Milton Hurd and construction company Havens & Coughlin to build a permanent synagogue in 1927. An article in the local newspaper stated the congregation had received pledges of \$32,000 toward the total expected cost of \$55,000. Also according to the article:

Specifications call for a structure of buff brick and litholite 85 feet in length, 42 feet in width, and 50 feet in height. The design is of Spanish and early Italian architecture treated in modern manner. The front elevation will have an arch treatment dominated by a large rose window, 16 feet in diameter and with stained glass background. The building will be entered by three massive doors with a wide approach on litholite steps across the front...The vestibule will have dimensions of 9x17 feet with stairways leading right to the basement and left to rest rooms and toilets. The vestibule will lead to an auditorium 36x56 feet with a seating capacity for 350 persons. The ceiling height of the room will be 25 feet, the ceiling being constructed of plaster beams with painted ornaments...An 11x22 foot platform is to be constructed at the rear of the room for the pulpit and ark, the latter being of Romanesque design of ornamental plaster. The pulpit will be flanked on either side by doors leading to a study and anteroom, through the latter of which the street may be seen. Memorial windows of stained glass will be used throughout the building. The basement of the building will consist of a banquet hall, 35x55 feet, kitchen, boiler room and men's toilets. A platform will be built at one end for church [*sic*] entertainment purposes. Exit from the room may be had from the rear. The building will be steam heated and contain modern plumbing. J. Milton Hurd is the architect in charge of the plans.⁷

The building was constructed on a typical residential street, close to the center of the city, with only one house demolished for its construction.⁸

Temple B'Nai Israel was dedicated on September 29, 1929 in an elaborate ceremony described in a newspaper account as "age old ritualistic impressiveness, tempered with modern informality." The sacred scrolls were formally moved to the new temple in a procession complete with prayers, songs, and readings. H.W. Marcus, still president of the congregation, delivered a welcoming address. Dignitaries present included the mayor of

⁶ F.W. Fitzgerald, Secretary Chamber of Commerce, "Olean: The Old and the New Town," in *Polk's Olean Directory*, Vol. VII (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1928), 9-11.

⁷ "Give \$32,000 Towards New Synagogue," n.p., 26 Nov. 1927. Clipping in Olean City Historian's office.

⁸ Forrest, 45.

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Olean and rabbis from Bradford, Pennsylvania and Buffalo, New York. Cantors came from Syracuse New York and from Bradford, Pennsylvania as well. The congregation's new rabbi, Herman A. Glatt, also delivered the dedicatory address, which was quoted in the article.⁹

J. (John) Milton Hurd, architect of Temple B'Nai Israel, was born in Wellsville, about thirty miles east of Olean, on September 10, 1895. His father was an engineer for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Hurd graduated from the local high school in 1912, winning a medal from the *Olean Times* for his commencement address on the subject "Sky Scrapers."¹⁰ He then attended Cornell University, majoring in architecture and graduating as an honor student in 1916. A notice in the local paper stated that following his graduation, he planned to take a job with the Le Bell Company of Cleveland, Ohio.¹¹ Hurd registered for the draft on June 5, 1917, stating that he was working as a draftsman for Charles J. Berg at 331 Madison Avenue in New York City. He served as a sergeant in the army in England and with the American Expeditionary Forces in France during World War I.¹²

After the war, J. Milton Hurd returned to Olean. The 1918 city directory listed him as an architect living at 118 South Second Street, his parents' home. He resided at the same address until around 1960, when he moved to an apartment at 115 South Barry Street. For most of his career, he worked out of his home except for a period of time in the 1920s when he had an office on the seventh floor of the Exchange National Bank Building in downtown Olean, which was when he designed Temple B'Nai Israel. He was listed in city directories as an architect until he retired in 1980. Hurd died in 1982 in Olean. His only relative listed in his obituary was a cousin living in Yonkers, New York.

Despite his very long career, few buildings designed by Hurd have been identified. His obituary failed to list any of his projects, noting only that he had designed "several buildings in Olean and surrounding area." A master's student who interviewed him recorded that in addition to designing several buildings in Olean, he also designed buildings in nearby Bradford, Coudersport, Wellsville, and Cuba.¹³ City historian's records have identified two of Hurd's Olean projects as the Pierce Residence in the Seneca Heights neighborhood (1929), and Bradner Stadium, a baseball stadium developed in 1926 on the site of a former basin on the Genesee Valley Canal. It is likely that Temple B'Nai Israel was one of his significant commissions. He designed it while in his early 30s, and, in an interesting coincidence, he lived just a few doors away from it for the last twenty or so years of his life. A student who interviewed Hurd recorded his thoughts about the temple: "Mr. Hurd, the architect, feels that the synagogue was both an original and beautiful design. He is especially proud of the beautiful stained-glass window in the front of the building which he helped to design."¹⁴

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, American synagogues were built in the popular styles of the times, looking much like churches and other public buildings, albeit often incorporating subtle Jewish symbolism. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many Jewish communities were interested in

⁹ "B'Nai Israel Synagogue Dedicated Here Sunday At Impressive Service," *Olean Evening Times* [30 September 1929].

¹⁰ "Times Medal was Awarded Last Night," *Olean Evening Times*, 27 June 1912, clipping in City Historian's office; and "Class of 1912 is Credit to School," *Olean Evening Times*, 27 June 1912.

¹¹ "J. Milton Hurd an Honor Graduate from Cornell," n.p., 13 June 1916, clipping in city historian's office.

¹² "J. Milton Hurd," obituary; *Olean Times-Herald*, 7 October 1982.

¹³ Forest, 45.

¹⁴ Forrest, 44.

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developing an architectural style specific to their history and culture, and archaeological discoveries began to provide evidence of appropriate models. After 1865, archaeological digs in the eastern Mediterranean uncovered synagogues located in ancient Jewish communities that used classical motifs, providing a justification for Classical Revival synagogue design. Other discoveries around the turn of the twentieth century found Byzantine-influenced synagogues in Palestine, inspiring the use of Byzantine motifs in synagogue design as well.¹⁵

One historically inspired design approach that proved particularly popular for synagogues was often referred to as "Moorish" style. These synagogues featured a creative blend of Islamic, Byzantine, Romanesque, and Oriental elements, including those associated with medieval Spain, and were considered particularly appropriate for European and American synagogues as an expression of the Eastern origins of the Jewish people. Domes, towers, and the use of flat surface ornament were among the characteristic elements.¹⁶ Moorish influences were also seen in other large building types, particularly theaters.

Congregation B'nai Jeshurun and Community House in Manhattan (1916-18) was a particularly notable and influential example of the use of design elements adapted from specifically Jewish historic sites rather than a generalized evocation of "Moorish," middle Eastern, or Classical motifs. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1989 as having a design that inaugurated a new "Semitic" style, described as a "mix of forms from Middle Eastern cultures where Judaism had flourished." The style quickly proved popular with Jewish congregations and was widely imitated.¹⁷

B'nai Jeshurun and one of the synagogues it influenced, Temple Beth-El of Borough Park, Brooklyn (1920), which was also listed in the National Register in 2010, are good comparisons with Temple B'Nai Israel, since all three buildings share a similar façade composition. The exterior of B'nai Jeshurun was described as lacking "the ornate decorative quality seen on the facades of the Central Synagogue and other early Moorish synagogues. Rather, B'nai Jeshurun is an austere stone building with ornament limited to the tall centrally placed entrance portal."¹⁸ Temple Beth-El of Borough Park had a "a monolithic stone-faced façade whose main feature is a grand entrance with successive layers of colonettes of varying design supporting a series of round arches."¹⁹ A third influential New York City synagogue with similarities to B'Nai Israel was Temple Emanu-El (NR listed 2007), designed by Robert D. Kohn, Charles Butler, and Clarence Stein and completed in January 1930, just a few months after B'Nai Israel. Clarence Stein described the design as being developed "from the Romanesque as used in the south of Italy under the influence of the Moorish, because it was an expression of the intermingling of Occidental and Oriental thought."²⁰ The Olean synagogue was described in a 1927 news article as being "of Spanish and early Italian architecture treated in modern manner."²¹

¹⁵ Henry and David Stoltzman, *Synagogue Architecture in America: Faith, Spirit & Identity* (Mulgrave, Victoria, Australia: The Images Publishing Group, 2004), 45.

¹⁶ See Stoltzman, 46-49.; Samuel D. Gruber, *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community* (New York, NY: Rizzoli, 2003), 47; Tony Robins, National Register Nomination for Temple Beth-El of Borough Park, Kings County, N.Y., 2010.

¹⁷ Andrew Scott Dolkart, National Register Nomination for Congregation B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue and Community House, New York, New York County. 1989.

¹⁸ Dolkart.

¹⁹ Robins.

²⁰ Stein, quoted in Gruber, 73.

²¹ "Give \$32,000 Towards New Synagogue," n.p., 26 Nov. 1927. Clipping in Olean City Historian's office.

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Cattaraugus County, New York

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Like the three New York synagogues, B'Nai Israel featured a large arched portal as the dominant element in the facade. B'nai Jeshurun's and Temple Beth-El, B'Nai Israel's façade is curved at the top, reflecting the curve of the central portal. On all three buildings, the large portal surround is embellished with layers of molding bands of varied decorative designs. With Temple B'Nai Israel, these were continuous, rope-like bands with no division of capital from the arch. This contrasted with B'nai Jeshurun and Temple Beth-El, which had traditional engaged columns supporting arches. Like Temple Emanu-El, the Olean building featured a molding that was continuous from one side to the other. This approach may have been seen as more eastern, in its emphasis on ornamental pattern rather than structure.

It was clear that Temple B'Nai Israel shared a common design vocabulary with the B'nai Jeshurun, Temple Beth-El, and Temple Emanu-El. Although the New York City synagogues were much larger and more elaborately composed and detailed, Hurd successfully applied the same façade composition and similar detailing at a scale appropriate to the size of the congregation and community. The building, in its aesthetic ambition and permanence, clearly announced the success of the local Jewish congregation, its perception of itself as an enduring part of the Olean community, and its aspirations for continued growth. At the same time, the design celebrated the congregation's cultural distinctiveness, through the use of a blend of motifs that by the 1920s, were considered specifically appropriate for synagogue architecture.

In 1929, the elaborate dedication ceremony for B'Nai Israel Temple was a defining moment for the Jewish community in Olean. The completion of the project energized the local Jewish community, inspiring local families who had not yet joined the congregation to do so, which resulted in the doubling of the congregation's size, from about 30 families to about 70, in the 1920s-30s.²² Rabbi Glatt, who was new to the congregation when the building was completed, was considered one of the congregation's best Rabbis. Rabbi Glatt stayed for several years and was succeeded by Rabbi Lebowitz, who was ordained in the Reform tradition at Hebrew Union College, although the congregation was then affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. The congregation formally affiliated with the Reform movement after World War II. As B'Nai Israel was the only synagogue in Olean, its rabbis had to accommodate Jews from the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox traditions alike, a situation that was common in small congregations where compromises had to be made on issues such as gender-segregated versus mixed family seating, and the wearing of hats.²³

As the spiritual and social center for the local Jewish community, Temple B'Nai Israel provided a haven for the Jewish people in Olean, especially during the Second World War, when faced with the fear of Nazism. Not only did this strengthen the bond with their fellow Americans, it brought the Jewish communities closer together wherever they existed.²⁴ After the war, however, the congregation experienced a leveling in numbers and commencement of a gradual and sustained decline. These changing pattern in membership at B'Nai Israel reflected a variety of factors, some endemic to Olean's general economic and population decline and some unique to the Jewish community in Olean. The city's most important industrial base began to suffer in the 1930s, with discovery of large oil fields in Oklahoma and Texas. It was dealt a major blow in 1954 when the

²² Forrest, 45, 50.

²³ Forrest, 69; and Weissbach, 162-165.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 46.

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Socony Oil Company moved to Washington State.²⁵ This was followed by the loss of other types of manufacturing, such as Daystrom Furniture, which moved to Virginia in 1962.

As growth opportunities in Olean decreased, fewer Jewish merchants opened businesses in the retail trades. At the same time, the arrival of more national chains and development of shopping plazas and malls threatened the viability of businesses owned by local merchants in general. Like the public in general, a decline in the local Jewish population resulted as Jewish high-school graduates attended colleges and universities outside Olean and declined to return in the face of limited professional and business opportunities at home. A few new Jewish families arrived, but as more left Olean than arrived, the result was a net decline in the size of the community and the inability to attract and retain qualified rabbis.

At times the congregation shared its rabbis with the neighboring congregation of Temple Beth El in Bradford, Pennsylvania. One of the most notable rabbis under this arrangement was Rabbi Kurt Metzger, who shared the rabbinical position at B'Nai Israel and Temple Beth El for about eight years in the 1960s and early 1970s. Metzger was born in Nuremberg, Germany, where he served as a rabbi. He also served in Landau. He came to the United States in 1940 after surviving several months in the Buchenwald concentration camp. He became a Jewish chaplain and was a rabbi for several congregations in New York State before arriving in Olean. While serving at B'Nai Israel and Beth El, he was invited by the mayor of Landau, Germany to help dedicate a monument commemorating that city's synagogue, where he had once been rabbi and which was destroyed by the Nazis in 1938. In 1973, Rabbi Metzger was called to Temple Beth El outside of Rochester, New York.²⁶

Temple B'Nai Israel still functions as an active synagogue in spite of the decline of the congregation's size in recent decades. The building still retains the distinctive characteristics of the eclectic 1920s "Moorish" or "Semitic" synagogue architecture. It also conveys the sense of sacred space in its worship space and continues to be an important spiritual and social center for the local Jewish community.

²⁵ Frederickson, 119-121.

²⁶ Gerhard Jochem, "Kurt Metzger: Nuremberg's Last Rabbi," from "Leaving Nuremberg: An Internet presentation on Jewish emigration 1933 to 1945," at JewishGen, <http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/nuremberg2/nur013.html>. Accessed 22 April 2011.

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Temple B'Nai Israel
Name of Property

Cattaraugus County, New York
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 216461 4663929
Zone Easting Northing

2 18
Zone Easting Northing

3 18
Zone Easting Northing

4 18
Zone Easting Northing

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia L. Bartos, Ph.D., Historic Preservation Program Analyst
organization NYS OPRHP/Peebles Island State Park date 19 October 2011
street & number PO Box 189 telephone 518-237-8643
city or town Waterford state NY zip code 12188

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and **white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Temple B'Nai Israel
street & number 127 South Barry St telephone n/a
city or town Olean state NY zip code 14760

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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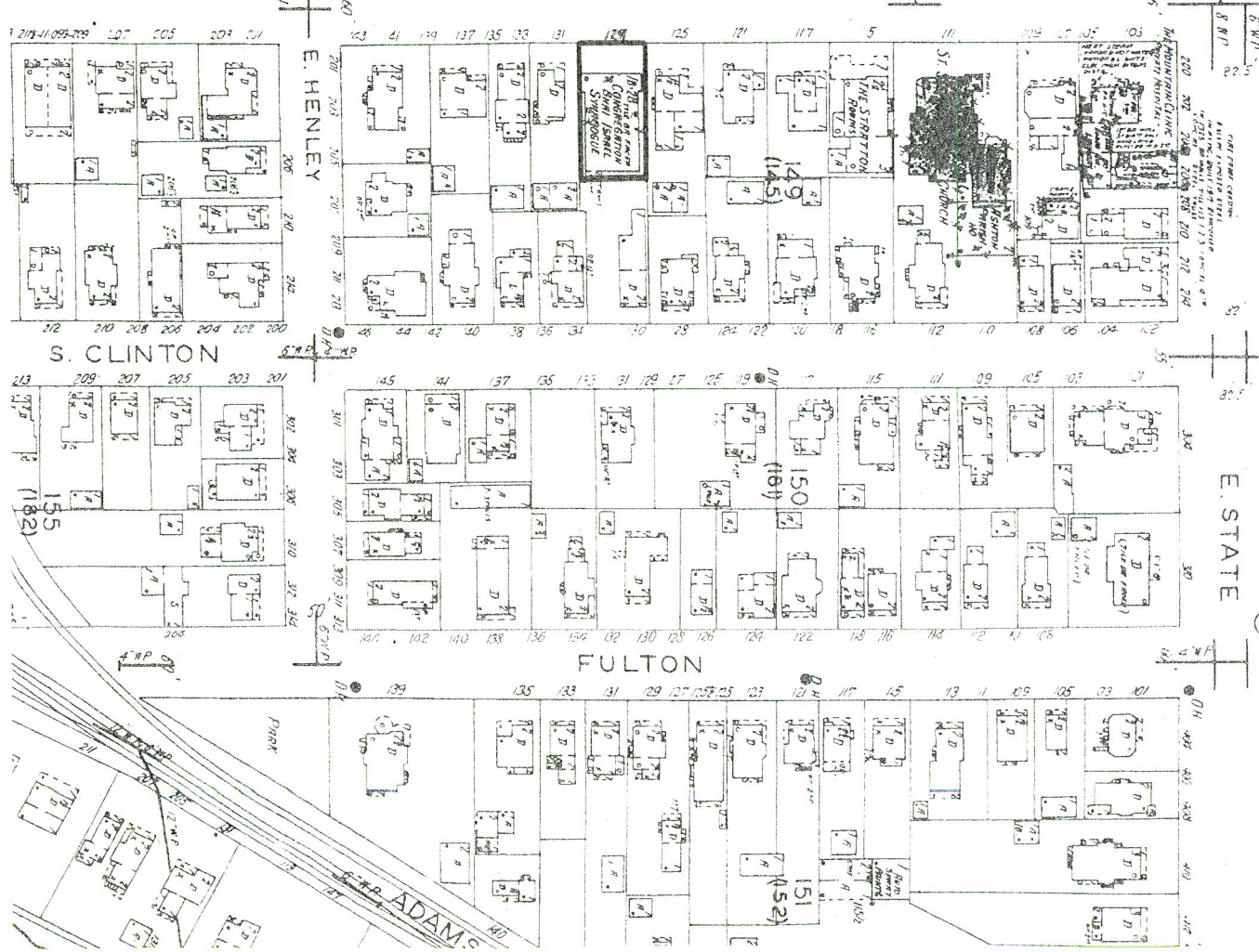
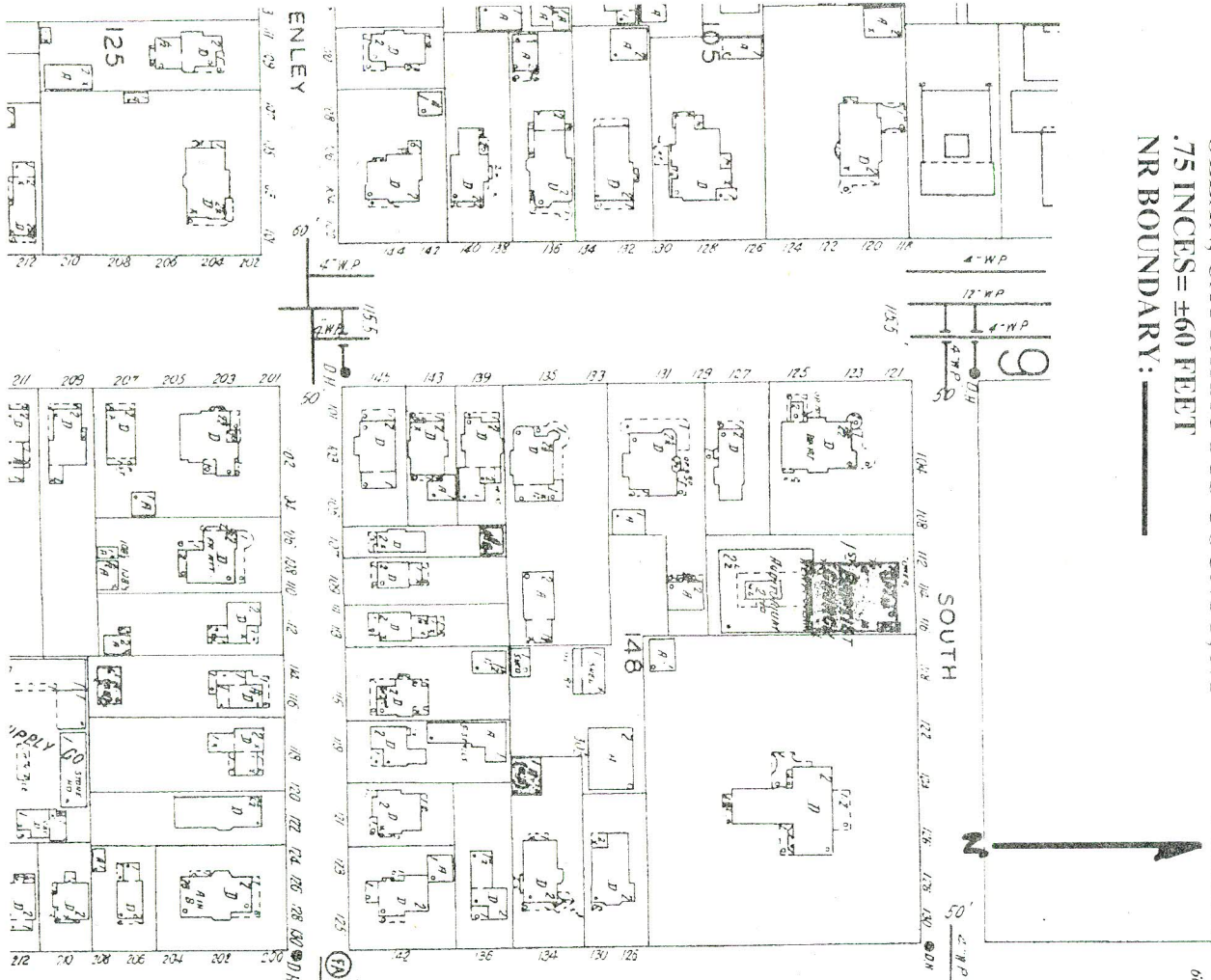
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The building is centrally located in a rectangular lot on the east side South Barry Street. The west boundary fronts the street for 50 feet. The north and south boundaries extend east for 115 feet and the east boundary runs between the north and south boundaries for 50 feet. The boundary is illustrated on the attached map.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The property boundary is the same as during the period of significance.

TEMPLE B'NAI ISRAEL
 OLEAN, CATTARAUGUS COUNTY, NY
 .75 INCHES = ±60 FEET
 NR BOUNDARY: —



Temple B'Nai Israel
Cattaraugus County, New York

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PHOTOGRAPH LIST

Temple B'Nai Israel, 127 South Barry Street, Olean NY

Digital photographs taken by Katie Eggers Comeau on 5 May 2011. Copy of CD-R with images on file in the offices of the Field Services Bureau of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Peebles Island State Park, Waterford, New York.

Photo # 1: Main façade/west elevation, viewed from South Barry Street looking northeast.

Photo # 2: Detail view of window tracery over main entrance (west elevation).

Photo # 3: Detail view of main entrance decorative arch (west elevation).

Photo # 4: Interior worship space looking east toward the Ark.

Photo #5: Interior view looking west toward main entrance.

Photo #6: East elevation (rear) of building, view looking west.



